

Report

Pecos National Historical Park

■ 1.0 Site Description

Pecos National Historical Park is located in three separate units along Interstate 25, south-east of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Its three units are spaced along 17 miles of I-25 or about eight to 10 miles in a straight line. The only unit open to the public in 1999 is the eastern-most unit that is five miles north of I-25. Refer to Figure 1. The Park is immediately adjacent to the Santa Fe National Forest, a gateway to the Pecos Wilderness. The Pecos NHP visitor center is two miles south of the town of Pecos, New Mexico.

Figure 1.



Pecos is a National Historical Park (NHP) managed by the NPS. The mission of the park is to preserve and protect for the enjoyment of current and future generations the cultural and historical resources of the site.

Pecos NHP is a 6,000-acre (9.4-square-mile) park comprised of level to rolling terrain. The key physical characteristics of the Park related to transportation are as follows.

- It is composed of three independent units, eight to 10 miles apart, with private land between the units;
- The GMP calls for opening of the additional two units to the public, but does not detail how ticketing or circulation should work between the three units;
- It is affected by significant volumes of high-speed commuter traffic between the Town of Pecos and Santa Fe on New Mexico Highway 50 (NM 50);
- The middle unit, Pigeon's Ranch, is bisected by NM 50;
- There is an Amtrak rail line running through part of the Park; and
- The Park also contains part of the historic Santa Fe Trail as well as the proposed bicycle/pedestrian/equine facility known as the New Santa Fe Trail.

Annual visitation at Pecos NHP is approximately 40,000 to 50,000 persons. June through August is the peak season with each of these three months averaging about 5,600 visitors per month. Peak visitation days are Fridays through Tuesdays. The usual length of stay at the site is one to two hours.

The top five transportation issues or problems as identified by site staff are:

1. Commuter route (NM 50) bisecting the Civil War battlefield portion of the Park;
2. Visitor access to and distribution among the three portions of the Park once the other two parts are opened to the public;
3. Administration/operation of the fee collections among the three portions of the Park;
4. Proposed redesign of NM 63 north-south through the main portion of the site; and
5. Speeding on NM 63 between Rowe and Pecos.

Related to (1) above, there is currently no parking or off-highway access for the park-operated tours. With commuters who drive over the speed limit on that road, the safety of tour participants is at risk. The only remaining structure standing at that site is a mere three feet from the roadway edge.

Related to (2) above are concerns about where staging (i.e., parking) should occur and how visitors circulate between the portions of the Park. Circulation and parking demands are higher if use of private autos is assumed.

Related to (4) above are concerns about a curve in the highway and a bridge near Kozlowski's Ranch.

During the summer, the visitor center parking lot of 30 spaces is full most days. This typically occurs between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. When it reaches capacity, people begin parking along the fences and in the picnic area. Tour buses are shunted to the Headquarters

area to wait while their passengers are seeing the Park. With visitors parking in the picnic area, park fees do not get paid, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Amtrak trains go through the westernmost portion of the Park at Cañoncito. The Southwest Chief goes through Las Vegas (New Mexico), Lamy, and into Albuquerque, with connecting service between Lamy and Santa Fe. Amtrak currently provides some audio interpretation of the Park as it passes through.

In addition to the proximity of NM 50 to Pigeon's Ranch, NM 50 is also very close to a creek there. The vacation of this section of the highway, and realignment, would reduce the associated wetland impacts of the highway.

Because of its proximity to both Santa Fe and to the adjacent National Forest, opportunities exist to increase the recreational nature/function of Pecos NHP. The proposed New Santa Fe Trail could potentially convert some rail right-of-way to paved bicycle trails to/from Santa Fe, and pass through the western part of the Park. In addition, the redesign of NM 63 on the eastern side of the Park could be improved to include bicycle lanes.

Trails proposed for Pecos NHP could potentially be extended to provide a southerly access point into the Santa Fe National Forest. Pecos staff report that they often provide directions and information about the Santa Fe National Forest to hikers who arrive on days when the nearby Forest Service office is closed (Sundays and Holidays).

Pecos NHP has recently been through the update process for its General Management Plan (GMP). A Draft GMP/EIS was released in 1995. The record of decision (ROD) on that Draft was approved in March of 1997.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

Between 1990, when the Park expanded its acreage, and 1997, Pecos NHP staff had an informal system of providing tours to Pigeon's Ranch. During that time, the maximum number of tours given in any single year was 101.

In 1998, the Park initiated a more formal tour schedule. The Park rents a 15-passenger van from the General Services Administration (GSA) for the three summer months. The van takes visitors between the main part of the Park and Pigeon's Ranch. The cost for the rental is \$4,000 to \$5,000 and comes out of the 10 percent of the discretionary portion of the budget which is also used for staff training and travel. Outside of the three summer months staff members or volunteers use and are reimbursed for mileage on their personal vans. With this more formal tour schedule, 164 tours were provided in 1998. Year-to-date 1999 more than 190 tours have been provided. The staff this year is receiving more requests than they have been able to fully accommodate. In fact some tours exceed 15 passengers and volunteers have supplemented it with their own vans on occasion. The estimated number of visitors served so far this year is 2,850 (15 x 190).

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

- **On-Site Shuttle** – Once all three parts of the Park are open to the public, one concept is to do a pay-once, park-once system. Visitors would pay and park at whichever of the three portions of the Park they entered at. A shuttle on 10- to 20-minute headways would circulate visitors between portions of the Park such that visitors would not have to move their private autos.
- **Pecos-Santa Fe Bus** – A bus system could take commuters in from Pecos to Santa Fe in the early morning and return with park visitors mid morning. It could make one or two more visitor-only runs during the midday, then serve the Santa Fe back to Pecos trip in the evening peak hour. (A passenger rail variant of this alternative is possible, but would likely be more expensive to implement.)
- **On-Site Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails** – The construction of on-site pedestrian and bicycle trails would connect the Park to the New Santa Fe Trail and provide access to the Santa Fe National Forest/Pecos Wilderness.

■ 4.0 Basis for ATS Needs

Pecos National Historical Park is located just outside of Santa Fe, New Mexico. It is experiencing increases in visitation, in part due to the popularity of Santa Fe, and in part due to the Historical Park's increased visitor tours. The Park acquired additional land about 10 years ago, parts of which are physically separated from the park headquarters and visitor center. Growth and physical separation, together, have created a need to explore alternative transportation as a means of improving access and circulation while minimizing the impacts to the cultural/historical resources.

Potential Alternative Transportation System (ATS) needs have been identified for this site as follows: 1) an on-site shuttle system, 2) a bus between Pecos and Santa Fe, and 3) the development of on-site pedestrian and bicycle trails.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Pecos National Historical Park. Draft General Management Plan & Environmental Impact Statement. (Excerpt copies.) 1995.

Pecos National Historical Park. Internet site: <http://www.recreation.gov/detail.cfm?ID=825>. Information printed October 27, 1999.

Pecos National Historical Park, New Mexico. "Pecos." Map and Guide. GPO: 1996-404-952/40107.

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Judy Reed, Acting Superintendent. Telephone Interview. November 5, 1999

Judy Reed, Cultural Resources Specialist/Acting Superintendent; Vito Spinelli, Maintenance Supervisor; Wendy Launtzen, Chief of Education. Telephone Interview. November 10, 1999